

## 6 Who Won the War?

Most historical accounts generally align on the following events of the Sino-Nepalese War:

It all started with King Prithvi Narayan Shah (r. 1769–1775), the visionary founder of unified Nepal. He gave an important teaching to his people in his work *Divyopadeśa* (“*Holy Teaching*”). He metaphorically referred to Nepal as a “yam between two rocks” (Stiller 1989, 42) and thus the squeezed location of Gorkha, which later became Nepal, in the middle of China and (British) India. In this regard, King Prithvi gave the following advice to his people:

Maintain a treaty of friendship with the Emperor of China. Keep also a treaty of friendship with the Emperor of the Southern Sea [i.e., the Viceroy in Calcutta]. (Stiller 1989, 42)

However, Pṛthvī Nārāyaṇa’s youngest son, Bahadur Shah, who became Regent in 1785 due to the young age of two years of King Rana Bahadur Shah disregarded his father’s message and initiated the Sino-Nepalese conflict, also known as the Gorkha-China War. Following an extended period marked by strained relations between Nepal and Tibet, chiefly stemming from trade disputes and Nepalese control over the minting of silver coins for Tibet, Bahadur Shah initiated a significant incursion into Tibet in 1788. This military campaign saw the seizure of Kerung and Kuti, accompanied by the defeat of Tibetan forces. Subsequent negotiations yielded terms favouring the Gorkhalis, securing monopolistic advantages and an annual payment of 50,000 Rupees (= 300 ingots) from Tibet, *alias* the treaty of Kyirong 1789. This was concealed by the Qing Imperial Commissioner Bajung and ended with the first envoy to Peking in 1790.

Tensions escalated when Tibet ceased paying the agreed tribute. Concurrently, upon the death of the sixth Panchen Lama of Tashilhunpo in Peking, his younger brother, the Sharmapa Lama, sought refuge in Kathmandu, whereas the elder brother Drungpa Hutuktu, the treasurer

of Tashilhunpo, held the abundant donations to Panchen Lama in the Tashilhunpo monastery. The Gorkhalis launched another invasion of Tibet, culminating in the looting of the prosperous Tashilhunpo monastery in October 1791.

This aggressive action prompted the Tibetan government to appeal for assistance from the Chinese Emperor Qianlong, who claimed suzerainty over Tibet. In response, the Emperor dispatched a substantial force under the command of the Great General Fuk'anggan. After several battles, the Chinese forces advanced up to Betravati, a day's journey from Kathmandu. Agreements were reached there, which notably included the quinquennial mission of Nepal to Beijing.

What is open or debated, is the question: Who won the war? Obviously, there is no clear winner of the war, even if it is claimed by both the Gorkhali and the Chinese sides. In general, the researchers who have dealt with the topic have also mostly sided with their sources. A closer examination of the sources, however, uncovers numerous interconnected factors.

## 6.1 The Nepalese Perspective

The Nepalese sources mostly saw themselves as the winners even though they surrendered several times and in various forms. Thus, the *Nepālikabhūpavaṃśāvalī* clearly states: “[Rana Bahadur Shah] killed the Chinese army. He thus caused the Chinese Emperor to praise him.”<sup>365</sup> In Rana Bahadur Shah's letter of 1792 (Part II, 2.1.4), too, the victory is claimed:

When the enemy was only at one day's distance from Kathmandu, we checked him where possible and negotiated where this was to our interest. We then wrote to you about what had happened here and asked you to come post-haste. By the grace [of the goddess (*īśvarī*)] we faced the enemy by means of strength and tactics and repulsed him, maintaining the country (*dhuṅgo*) independent as usual.

365 *Nepālikabhūpavaṃśāvalī* 20.92, 135.

Likewise, Padmagiris chronicle declares Nepal the winner:

When the Chinese forces had reached as far as Daibang [Dhainbung] in the Nepalese territory, Ran Bahadur despatched to oppose them a Gorkha army under the command of his principal Chief Damodar Pande, who destroyed the Chinese forces and concluded a treaty favourable for the Nepal Raja.<sup>366</sup>

These passages are interpreted by Vajrācārya and Nepāla as follows:

Some foreign historians have claimed that Nepal became part of the Chinese empire as a result of the Sino-Nepalese War. However, these letters [from King Raṇa Bahādura Śāha] clearly demonstrate that Nepal did not come under Chinese sovereignty in any form. Nepal's decision to sign a treaty with China was not a consequence of defeat in the war. In fact, the Nepalese forces successfully defeated the Chinese army in the penultimate battle at Betravati, and their military strength remained intact. (...) The Chinese forces reached the outskirts of Nepalese capital. In this situation, there was a potential for British intervention if the conflict with China persisted. Thus, signing a treaty with China was a wise decision under the given circumstances. The treaty did not include any provisions requiring Nepal to accept Chinese sovereignty or impose terms that would cause disadvantage to Nepal.

The treaty's provision for quinquennial delegations to China was advantageous for Nepal. It established direct diplomatic relations between the two governments, ensuring uninterrupted Sino-Nepalese relations. These ties continued until VS 1965 (1908) during the reign of Candra Śamaśera. However, the fall of the Chinese emperorship disrupted diplomatic relations. The relations were later resumed in VS 2012 (1955), based on the *pañcaśīla* principles [for peaceful co-existence].<sup>367</sup>

In Rana Bahadur Shah's letter to Gajarāja Miśra (the *rājaguru* of the King), the victory over the Chinese, which resulted in a peace treaty, is described in drastic terms:

366 Hasrat 1971, 94.

367 Vajrācārya and Nepāla 1957/70, 73–74 (our translation).

A severe engagement took place in which the enemy suffered a heavy loss. Hundreds of his troops were killed and as many wounded. Some fell in the river and were drowned. The rest were routed. The Vazir in fury cut off the noses of two of his officers who were so disgusted at this mortifying disgrace that they drowned themselves in the river. Besides this, the heat of the summer season in Nepal, which is termed the *aul*, also took a heavy toll of the Chinese army. At last, peace was concluded according to which the two Bhotia diwans [Tibetan ministers, g. Yu thog and Tenzin Peljor] who had been brought as captives from Digarchi [Digarca]<sup>368</sup> were released and the property which had been seized was restored. Similarly, a collection of fourteen parwanas [*parvāṇā*] written on gold leaf by the Emperor of China to the Lama of Digarchi,<sup>369</sup> was given up. In accordance with the wishes of the Vazir the writer also sent to him on 29 *Muharram* 1207 A. H. or 16 Asin (16 September 1792) some fifty men, including Diwan Deo Dutt Thappa [Devadatta Thāpā] and Balbhadar [Balabhadra Kūvara], with an *arzi* [*arjī*], some presents, and a *nazar*<sup>370</sup> [present] for the Emperor. The Vazir left for Peking on 20 Safar (8 October 1792) and took the Diwan with himself to introduce him to the Emperor there.<sup>371</sup>

Similarly, the Nuvakot Inscription of 1868 (Part II, 2.1.12) directly records the victory of Gorkha, stating: “The Emperor of China, accompanied by a large army, attacked Nepal with the intention of destroying it, but fled swiftly after witnessing the destruction of his own troops.” Furthermore, according to the Report of VS 1850 (11<sup>r-v</sup>), the Gorkhalis army was crushing the Chinese troops in the battle of Betravati:

The Gorkha King’s troops had the advantage of higher ground, whereas the Chinese troops were on a lower ground. Therefore, the Chinese troops fled, being unable to withstand the fight.

368 In fact, from Nyalam.

369 This is verified by the Chinese sources. For the Emperor, this was the major thing to be reclaimed. It was literally “golden album” 金冊, serving as the authorisation of the conference of the title Panchen Erdeni from the Qing Emperor to the Panchen Lama. Hence, we often translated it as “golden plates”, given its donative nature.

370 Probably (Persian) *nazrana*, “customary payment”, see McGregor 1997, s.v. *narana*.

371 CPC X, no. 851, 179.

Several Chinese soldiers were killed, while only a few of the Gorkha King's soldiers lost their lives. Some Chinese troops panicked, fell from the mountain and died, while others jumped into the Betravati river and drowned.

After realising that his troops had been defeated and had fled, the Minister [i.e. Fuk'anggan] watched them through his binoculars and issued the following order: 'Establish a strong checkpoint at the Betravati bridge and do not allow any fleeing soldiers who cross the Betravati river to pass. Chop off the nose of anyone who tries to cross and send additional troops.' The Minister himself came to this side of the bridge with thirteen cannons. At that time, the Gorkha King's troops at the checkpoint pushed back the Chinese troops to Betravati. Since the Chinese troops were in a hurry, they were unable to build the new bridge properly. In their rush to cross the bridge, many Chinese soldiers drowned in the Betrāvati from the broken bridge. The remaining soldiers threw two cannons into the river out of fear of the Gorkha King's troops, and many of them jumped into the river and died. When the Minister witnessed the defeat of his troops, he opened the way over the old bridge. One of his *sardāra-amban* broke his leg while fleeing, and the remaining soldiers carried him on their back and joined the Minister's troops. However, he died three days later. The battle between the Gorkha King's troops and the Chinese troops guarding the old bridge was fought using guns. There was a small hill near the bridge, and the Chinese Minister took the cannon unit to this hill and fired at the Gorkha King's troops.

[11v] As the Chinese army could not construct a defense out of wood and stone, they made a wall using the dead bodies of their own [troops] who had died painfully on the spot. The fight continued until dark, and both sides returned to their camps. The Minister also went back to his sleeping tent.

In this rather desperate situation, Fuk'anggan made another peace offer (11<sup>v</sup>–13<sup>r</sup>):

On the following day, the Minister summoned Bhoṭu Pāde and *ṭaksāri* Narasiṃ and spoke to them, saying: "When both our troops engage in battle, sometimes we win, and sometimes we are defeated. In such a situation no one should feel discouraged.

Previously, I had sent an order to the Gorkha King stating that we would settle the matter upon arriving in Nuvakot. I had also ordered my own troops to stay at this side of the bridge. Despite this, we suffered losses (lit. ‘my troops died’). Let us consider this a [tragic] play, which I myself watched. The people and the poor population must now feel extremely terrified. The Gorkha King and the British Resident need not worry about abandoning Nuvakot as I have decided to abandon my intention of marching to Nuvakot. [Therefore], it is not necessary for the venerable Mahārāja and venerable *saheba* [Bahadur Shah] to come to Nuvakot. Now I will write a few points to the venerable Mahārāja to please him. You, too, write to him to accept to what I will write. If we can agree on the terms, I will withdraw with my troops from this realm to my own realm, report to the Chinese Emperor, persuade him, and arrange for many gifts (*khillat*) to be sent to the venerable Gorkha King and the venerable *saheba*.”

Minister Fuk’anggan then issued a letter to the Gorkha King outlining a proposal. He stated that if Shamarpa were still alive, he would have captured him, but if Shamarpa had died by divine will, he requested that the remains, valuables, servants, and items seized from the Gorkha King be sent to the Emperor as proof of the successful recovery of stolen goods. These included valuables looted from the Tashilhunpo Monastery, Chinese silk, golden vessels, and presents given to Tasilemum Lama of Digarca [Panchen of Shigatse]. He also requested the return of the fraudulent documents signed in Kerung due to Shamarpa’s actions. He further proposed that the two sides end hostilities by returning the documents to Peking, ending both documents, and negotiating with the Emperor. The Gorkha King was urged to send an official letter (*arjī*) to the Emperor with an exceptional tribute and one of the four *kājīs*. If these conditions were met, Fuk’anggan promised to withdraw his troops and return to his own realm. However, if the Gorkha King refused, the Minister threatened not to withdraw and to march into Nepal. The letter ended with a warning that if the Gorkha King preferred war, Fuk’anggan would prepare for it.

After reading Fuk’anggan’s letter, the Gorkha King consulted with his advisors. During this time, the Chinese troops fell ill with a fever, leading to many deaths and exacerbated by a lack of food supplies. Fuk’anggan repeatedly pressed for a reply from the Gorkha King.

Meanwhile, a letter from the Governor General in Calcutta advised the Gorkha King to maintain friendly relations with the Emperor. To strengthen ties, Captain William Kirkpatrick (= Chin. Ji-li-ba-di 幾哩巴底)<sup>372</sup> was to be sent to help mediate. After considering both the Chinese Minister's and the Governor General's advice, the Gorkha King decided that it was best to show respect to the Emperor and avoid conflict.

As a result, the Gorkha King sent a diplomatic mission to Beijing, led by *kājī* Devadatta Thapa and other officials. The delegation carried the requested official letter along with several items: the bones of Shamarpa Lama,<sup>373</sup> his servants, seized valuables,<sup>374</sup> silver and Chinese silk that had originally been presented by the Emperor to Panchen of Shigatse. They also brought extraordinary gifts for the Emperor.<sup>375</sup>

The agreement proposed is the so-called Treaty of Betravati, which contains four key points:

1. After five years, a *vakila* (representative) of the Gorkha King would go to the Emperor with an *arjī* (petition) and tributes to pay *darshana* and report back.
2. The Gorkha King and the Dalai Lama would maintain their friendship and refrain from future conflicts, keeping their respective territories.
3. Unalloyed coins of the Gorkha King would be accepted as such in transactions in Tibet, while adulterated coins would be given their corresponding value.
4. If any enemy threatened the Gorkha King's troops, it should be reported to the Emperor for assistance.

According to the Report of VS 1850, both parties agreed to these terms, and Fuk'anggan, along with his troops and Gorkhali representatives, left Dhaibung and returned to China. The officials of Rana Bahadur Shah accompanied Fuk'anggan to Kerung,<sup>376</sup> where they received extraordinary gifts and medals. Following the Fuk'anggan's instructions,

372 Mosca 2013, 320.

373 In fact, the bones of Shamarpa did not reach Peking. The Emperor ordered it to be displayed in Tibet.

374 The seized valuables were mainly returned to Tashilhunpo or the Tibetan treasury.

375 See V.K. Manandhar 2001 for a description of this first of the subsequent quinquennial missions and the partly edition of the *arjī* and the letter of Devadatta Thāpā. It also contains two lists of the presents of the 1795 mission.

376 According to Chinese sources, they were forced to go to Kyirong to listen to the instructions of Fuk'anggan (see articles in Part II, 2.2.3d). This was

they sent injured Chinese soldiers and other commodities back to China and then returned to Nepal from Kerung.

Cengde, the head of the Chinese troops stationed in Listi, wrote a letter to the Gorkha King expressing affection. The Gorkha King replied with gifts for a feast, fostering goodwill. On the 2nd day of the bright fortnight of Kārttika, Cengde and his troops left Listi and returned to the plateau of Tingri, where he met other parts of the troops.

After Fuk'anggan and the head of the Chinese troops returned to Lhasa, they left three Lamas from Digarca, Samkhya [Saskya] and Lhasa. Subsequently, they arrested the noblemen of Tibet and their associates, including Aitu Kaji [g.Yu thog] and Tenzin Peljor along with Tava Kaj. The previous police officer (*thānedāra*) and amban of Lhasa were also fettered, and two new ambans and about five hundred soldiers were appointed as policemen (*thānedāra*) in Lhasa. The Chinese forces left Lhasa and returned to their side in the February/March.

During their stay in Rana Bahadur's territories, many Chinese soldiers were injured and died due to the hot season and strong winds. Forced labourers from Tibet were brought in to bury the corpses, and due to a shortage of wood, they took it from the houses. The Tibet realm experienced additional challenges, including deaths from small-pox, leading to the closure of the two-way trading route.

Consequently, the political authority in Tibet shifted, with the *kājīs* and the Dalai Lama of Tibet losing influence. The Tibetans were now considered subjects or cultivators of China, and Chinese orders are followed in the region.

In conclusion, the Nepalese sources indicate that there was no definitive winner, but rather competing claims of victory. The notion that Nepal emerged victorious can only be upheld by overlooking key nuances or by selectively emphasizing certain aspects in a one-sided or distorted manner. This is particularly evident in discussions about the challenges faced by Chinese troops with the difficult terrain and harsh weather conditions. This situation is cited in the VS 1850 Report as a reason for the Chinese withdrawal. Tenzin Peljor, Yang Kui, Zhao-lian, and Wei Yüan as well as a secret report from Fuk'anggan to the Emperor<sup>377</sup> support this view to a certain extent saying the soldiers

taken as a signal for their submission. But surely, they were warmly received together with the army, probably by Heliyen, as they had surrendered.

377 Deng 2009. See also the edict ordering Fuk'anggan on 7 October 1792 (Part II, 2.2.6d).

become less than 5000 owing to injury, illness, natural hazards such as snowfall, hunger, etc.

In addition, there are those mentioned letters between Rana Bahadur Shah and Fuk'anggan or the Emperor, preserved in Chinese. Some of them are published in Part II for the first time, with which the Gorkha King capitulated several times and submissively (see Part II, 2.2.2, 3).<sup>378</sup> Most later Chinese historiography, beginning with the Potala Inscription spoke of two official capitulations, while WZTZ gave even more. According to WZTZ, after a series of capitulations, King Rana Bahadur Shah writes to Fuk'anggan the following on 11 September 1792, speaking of the tribute (2.2.3d):

The tribe of the tiny one (hereafter normalised as “I/we”) looted the Tashilhunpo. Naturally, I should observe the summons and instructions, sending all looted objects out. When the soldiers of our tribe came back from the Back of Tibet last year, many were frozen to death due to the heavenly punishment for their offence. (...)

Moreover, I wish to obediently submit with allegiance to the Heavenly Dynasty wholeheartedly. If I should enjoy the grace [of the Great Emperor] that remit my crime with lenience, not only my life but also the entire territory would be spared and awarded by the Great Emperor. The lives of my headpersons and subjects were also made intact by the compassion of the Great Emperor.

Now, I am preparing the auspicious memorial and tribute. I am about to despatch the chief headperson to Peking. He will plead for forgiveness and imperial grace upon his audience with the heavenly face of the Great Emperor. Regarding the tribute, I do not know the statutes of the Heavenly Dynasty. I am afraid there might be mistakes. Moreover, since I am in a remote, desolate, and tiny region, there is no good product from [our region]. It is hard to express my tiny mind of reverence and fear. (...)

378 Other letters of surrender from Rana Bahadur Shah kept in China (see Part II, 2.22a-d) were written or sent on 16 July 1792 (QL 57/5/28) and Fuk'anggan's reply on 2 August 1792 (QL 57/6/15); on 27 July 1792 (QL 57/6/9) (WZTZ 1896, vol. 13.2, 26–28; WZTZ 1982, 402–4); on 25 August 1792 (QL 57/7/8) (KRKJL, vol. 39, QL 57/8/22; WZTZ 1896, vol. 13.2, 34–36; WZTZ 1982, 409–10); and on 11 September (QL 57/8), while the *kāji* arrived in the Chinese camp on 23 September as the ambassador (QL 57/8/8) (KRKJL, vol. 45, QL 57/9/16; WZTZ 1896, vol. 13.3, 6–13; WZTZ 1982, 422–24).

In the official letter of surrender from September 1792 to the Emperor via Fuk'anggan, Rana Bahadur Shah showed himself even more submissive as it begins (Part II, 2.2.3a):

The auspicious memorial presented with reverence [to the Emperor]: “Your junior minister, Raṇa Bahādura Śāha, along with the uncle of your junior minister, Bahādura Śāha, having kneeed down and kowtowed with joint palm and reverence, offered upwards the auspicious memorial to the chariot of the Great Emperor who is like the all-pervasive heavens that breed [every species] and shines like the sun and moon.”

These letters show unequivocally that Gorkha explicitly and humbly admitted the loss of the war and declared that it was ready for appropriate tributes. However, such declarations do not mean that there was a strict vassal-like relationship between China and Gorkha. We will come back to this in the next but one section. Moreover, since we have not been able to find the original letters in Nepali, we do not know whether they were written by Rana Bahadur Shah or his regent. It seems that such letters were often intensively polished by the translators to adjust to the imperial rhetoric and please the Emperor.

## 6.2 The Chinese and Tibetan Perspectives

For the Chinese and Tibetans, it was mostly clear that they had also won the war.<sup>379</sup> In the 1840s, Wei Yuan wrote in his popular historical narrative: “Their [the Gorkhalis’] capitulation was approved.”<sup>380</sup> Schuyler Camman, basing his analysis on *T'ung-hua hsü-lü* (Courtly Records compiled in 1884), also interprets China as the indisputable victor of the conflict: “Fuk'ang-an, a Tartar [Manchu] General

379 The literature relying on Chinese or Tibetan sources confirm this statement from Markham 1876, lxxvii (“Thus a decisive victory was gained within one march of the enemy’s capital, in September 1792”) to F.X. Erhard 2020b (the “Gorkha ultimately surrendered.”); see also Landon 1976, vol. 2, 280; Sreedhar 1988, App. 3; Dabringhaus 1994, 56 (“bedingungslose Kapitulation”); F.K. Ehrhard 2007, 115. The exception is Ulrich Theobald (2020, 127), who speaks of a “truce” concluded in Betravati.

380 See Part II, 2.2.8, 5 I[“The Surrender of Gorkha”], Landon 1976, vol. 2, 280; cp. Dabringhaus 1994, 41 with references to further Chinese sources and Sreedhar 1988, App. 3.

and Chinese military leader, achieved a significant victory over the Gurkhas at Nawakot [Nuvakot], a mere twenty miles from the Gurkha capital.”<sup>381</sup>

Tracing it back to 1792–1793, it was clear to the Emperor that the Qing troops had won. Already in the letters across the battlefield, Gorkha admitted being subordinate to China. Thus, Rana Bahadur Shah declared: “We, Gorkha, and the Tibetans are both subordinate to the Heavenly Dynasty and still in a good relationship with each other.” (Part II, 2.2.2a) As a reply to this, Fuk’anggan criticised King Rana Bahadur Shah for refusing to properly surrender to China. The words he uses are rather undiplomatic, to say the least:

We had continuous victories. Upon the victories, I shall march forward to your hideout (Kathmandu). I must intensively annihilate Gorkha, sparing no living beings. It can never be veiled by arguments or groundless utterances.

You and Bahādura Śāha, Bam Śāha, and Shamarpa should come to us in person to plead for forgiveness before our great army reaches Kathmandu. You should put your head in the mud in front of the door of our military camp. I, the Great General shall have insight into your sincerity or hypocrisy.

Not only Fuk’anggan declared so on the battlefield, the chief counsellor Hailanca also believed that the Gorkhals, Bahadur Shah in particular, had a strong wish to surrender and gave evidence for that. In the KRKD, which was not a public text, the Emperor ordered the Grand Council to ask Hailanca on 2 February 1793 (QL 57/12/22): “Who had decided to surrender on the Gorkhali side?” Hailanca replied that it was Bahadur Shah who had decided to surrender. He noted that Narasimha and Bhotu Pande had told him that Bahadur Shah had punished those who opposed the surrender.<sup>382</sup>

Even earlier than the inquiry, the Emperor himself had already declared the authorisation of Gorkha’s surrender to the whole Empire, as he wrote in the quadrilingual inscription from 1792 engraved in Tibetan, Manchu, Mongolian and Chinese<sup>383</sup> on a stone slab at the

381 Cammann 1951, 129.

382 KRKD QL 57/12, 93: 詢問海蘭察，據稱廓爾喀一切事情俱係巴都爾薩野辦理，此次投誠據他那裏差來的頭人乃爾興、普都爾幫哩說起即係巴都爾薩野的主意，他還說他手下有不願的人，巴都爾薩野還治了他的不是。

383 Shakabpa 1967, 168.

foot of the Potala in Lhasa (2.2.5). He did not take any territory from Gorkha except for Dram that was offered by Gorkha as a signal of “submission of allegiance”. Hence, the Gorkhalis were not attached to the census and (*li ban-tu* 隸版圖)<sup>384</sup> but came in for an audience (*ru-jin* 入覲 Mnc. *dolo hargasānjimbi*) as the Torghuts, who also did a submission of allegiance earlier.<sup>385</sup> He decided not to integrate Gorkhali into the core of the Empire that should be managed with census and legal codes. Instead, he gave the territory back to them and regarded them as a remote tribe that would guard the border for the Heavenly Dynasty. He also accounted for not taking any territory and concluded the case with victory:

Even if I did fully seize their territory, given its thousands of *li* distance from the Tibetan border and its impossibility of cultivation and defence, it would eventually be given to others.<sup>386</sup> Hence, I descended my edict to authorise their surrender and ordered the victorious withdrawal of my forces, bringing this event to an end.<sup>387</sup>

The war was then placed among the Ten Complete Martial Glories of Qian-long: “and now the two receptions of the surrenders of the Gorkha” (Part II, 2.2.5),<sup>388</sup> commemorated lavishly by various books, banquets, paintings, and poems (Figure 15).<sup>389</sup>

From the Tibetan side, the Lhasa government addressed the victory that the Gorkhalis became subjects to the Buddhist teachings. The eighth Dalai Lama commented in March 1793 that Gorkha had then be turned into the servants of the monastics (*lha 'bangs*).<sup>390</sup> Similarly, the eighth Tatsag Hutuktu condemned the Gorkha to have been the enemies of the teaching (*bstan pa'i chom rkun pa* or *bstan dgra*). He emphasised the fear of Gorkha, which made them surrender without much violence involved, whereas the Gorkhalis easily (*bde blag nyid*

384 This implies no Qing imperial law code would apply to the Gorkhalis. The Emperor also did not require the ambans to send the census again after the Sino-Nepalese War in 1792, while Gorkha was never painted on the imperial maps.

385 Schorkowitz and Chia 2016, 216–17.

386 For the intricacies of this paragraph in Tibetan and Manchu, see Part II, 2.2.5.

387 Bell 1924, 275; Richardson 1974, 46; Landon 1976, vol. 2, 272.

388 Cp. Part II, 2.2.3c, no.s 4 and 5.

389 Bügener 2015.

390 DL8, 332.16–18.



Figure 15: The Audience of the Gorkhali envoy with the Emperor, 1793 (QL Guichou), a collaboration between Chinese and European painters, late eighteenth century (source: Wikimedia Commons)

du) became subjects or servants ([*chab*] ‘*bangs*).<sup>391</sup> Besides the Lhasa side, the autobiography of Rindzin Chöying Dorjé also “continues with a statement that the Gorkhas were defeated.”<sup>392</sup>

Apart from these decisive accounts of a final victory commemorated hyperbolically within the Empire, contemporaneous memorials, local chronicles, personal chronicles, and the diary of Jiang Zhen-xi seemed to avoid speaking too much about the last battle. This deliberate omission might be seen as a signal of failure. A sensitive Chinese reader will easily grasp the hidden pejorative meaning behind the subtle diction of these writings. The Chinese must have faced difficulties at last. Otherwise, they would exaggerate the military achievements more explicitly.

391 *dus 'dir yang bstan pa'i chom rkun pa de dag bsad gcod sogs cher ma dgos par de gong tsam nas phal mo che rang shugs su bros par gyur cing | phyin chad kyang bsam sbyor ngan pa'i sbyor ba mi rtsom par gus pas 'bangs su gtogs par rgyal blon dmangs bcas kun kyis khas len pa sogs bde blag nyid du chab 'bangs su bkol nus par gyur la.* “Then, without much need for killing, cutting, etc., those bandits who harmed the [Buddhist] teachings have mostly fled by [their] nature. Then, without engaging in impious intentions, being included as subjects due to reverence the king, ministers, and commoners all together assured. Thus, they were easily assigned the role of subjects/servants.” (Tatsag8, 370.14–16).

392 Erschbamer 2018, 135.

From the Tibetan side, Tenzin Peljor gave a detailed description of the catastrophic Betravati Battle (2.3.2e) during which the Chinese suffered great loss. He was later escorted separately to Peking but later witnessed the Gorkha mission (*gor kha'i mtshams zhus mi sna*) in the Palace.<sup>393</sup> He was not explicit about who won the war or if he really witnessed a surrender (2.3.2e).

As major actors passed away, the imperial tone started to be vol-umed down. Approximately 20 years after the war, Prince Zhao-lian (2.2.7) criticised Fuk'anggan severely for his failure in 1820s, echoing with the Report of VS 1850, as he wrote with sarcasm:

Upon reaching [the Betravātī Bridge],<sup>394</sup> Fuk'anggan felt as though [the troops] had smashed into the enemy's territory, as if splitting bamboo. Confident of a success within a day, he grew particularly arrogant and self-assured. Guarded in his palanquin, he waved a feather fan, comparing himself with the Marquis of Military [Zhuge Liang, the strategist during the Three Kingdom, whose implements were often a palanquin and a feather fan]. Likewise, he commanded. Our troops released their quivers and hung [weapons] from the horses, resting against their firearms. The enemy seized such a lapse to break in with a sudden counterattack. Our forces fell back in disarray. Taifingga was killed in this [skirmish], along with numerous other military officers who perished on the battlefield... Fuk'anggan further ruined the army afterwards. Yet, the timid and flinching barbarians were intimidated and awed by the might and virtue of our state.

Twenty years later, Wei Yuan, who sought to restore imperial glory (Part II 2.2.8), revised Zhao-Lian's account to downplay the defeat at Betravati, attributing it to the challenging natural landscape. However, he did acknowledge that the Gorkhalis' surrender occurred just before the Chinese troops were about to face a significant setback. These writings must have provoked doubts in nineteenth century and resulted in 1927 *Draft History of Qing's* conclusion that the Gorkhalis offered a truce rather than a surrender:

393 TP 958.

394 It was written as Rasuvāgadhī (Re-suo Bridge) but should be a mistake of Pa-lang-gu Bridge, which is Betrāvātī.

Fuk'anggan [proudly] relied on his victories, while the army was slightly unaltered. Fuk'anggan urged the troops to march forward despite the rain. The enemy made an ambush, waiting to attack. Taifingga fought to the death. The Gorkha ambassador requested for peace and was permitted by Fuk'anggan.<sup>395</sup>

### 6.3 Victory or Stalemate, Present or Tribute?

In the beginning of October 1792, the war came to an end. Whether by defeat, exhaustion or free will, is a question of debate. There were strong reasons for all parties to end the war. The Gorkha King faced limited resources, growing uncertainty about how much longer his forces could hold out, and the need to continue their expansionist campaign along the western border.

The Tibetans seemed to be afraid of the officers and troops coming in multitude from various directions. Shakabpa remarked that the imperial troops' "presence had caused a hundred times more harm to the Tibetans than the Gurkha invasion."<sup>396</sup> It was probably because the Chinese troops demanded many labours from the Tibetans in the form of *'u lag* ("forced labour"). Tenzin Peljor noted that several years later there was an anonymous poster on the Bridge of Yuthok (g.Yu thog) criticising him: "Therefore, in the future all Tibetans whether monks or laymen, men or women, will certainly be better off not requesting shelter from the Great Emperor, but rather seeking protection from the Gorkha King!" (quoted from Erhard 2020a, 336). The similar fear must have spread across the Tibetan territories, including Shigatse, Lhasa, Chamdo, Derge, and Dartsemdo. Such sentiment of the Tibetans was reported to the Chinese Emperor by Fuk'anggan, Heliyen, and Sun Shi-yi. It was said that people ran away when the great troops approached Tibet out of fear of smallpox and forced labour, even giving up spring cultivation and their own occupations.<sup>397</sup> Sun Shi-yi memorialised that around Chamdo were more than 1,000 *li* of territory with land discarded by the households that had all fled away into the

395 福康安恃勝，軍稍怠，督兵冒雨進；賊為伏以待，台斐英阿戰死。廓爾喀使請和，福康安允之。

396 Shakabpa 1967, 168.

397 KRKJL, vol. 26, QL 57/4/3 = Yuan Yi Lai, no. 902; KRKJL, vol. 301, QL 57/5/19, vol. 36, QL 57/7/16; vol. 53, QL 58/6/8; etc.

mountains.<sup>398</sup> The seventh Panchen's biography reported that a plague in Lhasa accompanied the arrival of the Chinese officers in 1792.<sup>399</sup> Later in the same year, even the mother of Panchen Lama and himself were affected after the Chinese troops returned from Nepal.<sup>400</sup>

As has been drawn from first-hand sources in 5.2, the Chinese troops had suffered great losses on the battlefield, suffered from illness and shortage of supply, feared to be cut off by the approaching winter, and did not want to occupy Gorkha permanently anyway. This situation is best commented by Schuyler Camman:<sup>401</sup>

Fu-k'ang-an, though tempted to sack Kathmandu, the Gurkha capital, refrained from doing so due to the Rajah of Nepal's reported flight with his treasury and the impending closure of the passes back to Tibet for the season. He opted not to risk being stranded in hostile territory without access to supplies.

Given the hardships in front of Fuk'anggan, the defeat at Betravati must have shaken his mind. Nevertheless, he would have to report it as a victory. It should be noted that similar cases occurred in Myanmar (1765–1769) and Annam (1788–1789), where a military defeat or stalemate on the battlefield was turned into a success and later commemorated as one of the martial glories upon the arrival of “tributary” envoys. Fuk'anggan's father, Fuheng was appointed the supreme general against Myanmar in 1769, after the death of the previous chief commanders, Liu Zao, Yang Ying-ju, and Mingšui. Fuheng and his troops suffered from illness, bad weather, torrents, lack of supply, and the agile guerrilla strategy of the Myanmar troops. Everyone would like to end the war. Towards the end of 1769, a treaty or truce was made between lower-ranking officials on both sides, without invoking higher officers.<sup>402</sup> The Emperor only concluded the success upon receiving

398 KRKJL, vol. 36, QL 57/7/26.

399 *di skabs lha sa'i nad dogs je che dang | zhol du'ang nad dogs re gnyis byung bas mjal phyag gi rigs rgyas bcad dang rgya dpon khag la'ang ja rgyugs gnang ma bde bas ja mar 'bul ba gnang* | “At that moment, Lhasa had more and more the suspicion of illness. Even at the foot of Potala (*zhol*), there was one or two [cases] of suspicious illness. The audiences were cut off entirely, while it was not convenient to hold tea gatherings for the Chinese officers.” (PC7, 122).

400 PC7, 126.

401 Cammann 1951, 129–34.

402 Dai 2004, 167.

the tribute in 1789 (QL 54), after he permitted the Myanmar request to resume trade.<sup>403</sup>

The Annam case was more dramatic, involving Fuk'anggan himself. According to Vietnamese sources written in Chinese, Fuk'anggan was bribed by the king of Vietnam and instructed him to write an auspicious memorial so as to please the Great Emperor. Later, the Vietnamese sent a fake king to Beijing to wear the Manchu robe and pay tribute, in which the Emperor took delight so much that he allowed the faked king to embrace the Emperor's knees at Jehol.<sup>404</sup> The Vietnamese envoy also wrote extremely flattering poems to the Emperor. The contemporary Korean ambassador was furious at such flattery and remarked that they had bribed Fuk'anggan to teach them how to please the Emperor.<sup>405</sup> It is also possible that the Gorkhalis were bribing him as well. Thereupon, Fuk'anggan was able to establish a lasting truce through a tributary relationship and submissive letters.

Worn down and demoralised, both sides were indeed exhausted and on the verge of letting go of past grievances. As Tenzin Peljor writes:<sup>406</sup> “Both sides expressed the desire to forget past ill feelings.” Fuk'anggan, foreseeing the hardships of marching on, made a truce or even a secret agreement with the Gorkhas, as Bajung had done during the first “campaign”. He was fortunate enough that the Emperor trusted him and authorised his decision immediately.

Despite the extravagant inscriptions in Lhasa, it is not unlikely that what is being memorialised is not what happened on the battlefield, but a way of the pacification of the Emperor rather than the disobedient Gorkhalis. It was more important to honour the Emperor with a reasonable story than to eradicate the Gorkhali enemies. The Emperor had doubts and thus made many inquiries with his ministers, such as Cengde, Ohūi, Dai-sen-bao, Hailanca, etc. separately, documented in KRKD, but he accepted what Fuk'anggan memorialised after all. At least publicly, the Qing Emperor no longer questioned the victory, took delight in his achievements, and ordered more commemorations.

403 *Draft History of Qing*, vol. 528, Biography no. 315, Vassals, no. 5.

404 *Da-nam*, vol. 30, 37–39. See also *Draft History of Qing*, vol. 527, Biography no. 304, Vassals no. 2 Vietnam.

405 Seo, 464, quoted by Ge 2014, 246.

406 Quoted from Shakabpa 1967, 168.

Nevertheless, the key question for us remains whether the outcome was truly a victory or more of a peace agreement or understanding. To clarify this, two critical questions require further attention:

- a) Was there any truce, treaty, or peace agreement? If so, in what form was it made, and what were its implications?
- b) Did Gorkha become a vassal of China? If so, in what manner, and what were the implications of the surrender?

### Truce, treaty, agreement or understanding?

Regarding the question of the agreement, one must take into consideration that for the Chinese Empire, there should not be a treaty unless it was with Russia. The Russian Emperor presented himself as the friend of Emperor Kangxi, avoiding calling himself the Kaiser in the diplomatic letter. The bilateral relation was managed in a familial way with the assistance of Jesuits instead on the state level with the Han-Chinese ministers.<sup>407</sup> Even for Russia, the treaty *Pactum Nertschiae* in Manchu, Latin, and Russian was not translated into the Chinese language until the Late Qing period. In the case of the aforementioned Sino-Myanmar “treaty”, the high-ranked generals were also absent, while the official narration called it a summon (*xi* 檄), instruction (*xun* 訓), or order (*yu* 諭).<sup>408</sup> Both imply the inferiority of Myanmar. In the Gorkha campaign, the same words were used by the Emperor Fuk’anggan for the letters and messages to Rana Bahadur Shah.

The society of the Han-Chinese literati might question the Emperor’s legitimacy if there happened to be an equally important ruler fighting with the empire. The Chinese Emperor should be the only heavenly son (*tian-zi* 天子) surpassed by nobody. A treaty would acknowledge another Emperor in the ecumene all under heavens. Therefore, to avoid the disgrace of referring to it as a “treaty” (*yue* 約) in the sense of negotiation,<sup>409</sup> the Qing Empire instead called it a “contract” (*quan* 券) or an “agreement” (*he-tong* 合同)<sup>410</sup> over some minor trade issue (*jiao-yi xi-gu* 交易細故).<sup>411</sup>

However, the Tibeto-Gorkha Kyirong treaty was indeed established in 1789, witnessed by Chinese. It was thus referred to in the following

407 Swen 2021.

408 Cp. Lobscheid 1866–69, 1033, 1257, 1715.

409 Ibid., 1822.

410 Ibid., 40, 490.

411 Ibid., 1810.

manner, avoiding the word “treaty”. Instead, it was often called “unofficial peace agreement” (*si-xia jiao-yi* 私下交易, literally “private transaction”).<sup>412</sup> The Archive Catalogue listed it as the proof with seals (*yin-jie* 印結). It should be noted that “proof” (*jie* 結) is different from a “treaty”, as it is often offered upward as a guarantee, while Fuk’anggan often called it “the large and the small agreements” (*da-xia he-tong* 大小合同). Even though the 1789 treaty of Kyirong was often called “contract”, Fuk’anggan insisted that it should be returned. Merely a private written contract was to arouse immense anxiety over such a disgrace for the Heavenly Dynasty.

As for “the Treaty Betravati”, it became uncertain whether it was a formal written agreement or an exchange of letters or an oral understanding. Written documents were referred to in the following manner during the Sino-Nepalese War: In the Sino-Nepalese negotiation, we also find “proof of willingness” (*gan-jie* 甘結).<sup>413</sup> The term was referred to in Fuk’anggan’s summon as a reply to Bhotu Pande’s request. He furiously rejected the Gorkhali request to “establish and issue” (*li-ju* 立具) such a document.<sup>414</sup> Quite a while after the Betravati Battle, on 7 October 1792, the Emperor requested the Gorkhalis to “offer upward their proof of willingness” (*chu-ju gan-jie* 出具甘結) while taking a vow in front of Yamāntaka (Vajrabhairava) (Part II, 2.2.3c). Such a written proof was unilateral and asymmetrical, as the Chinese refused to negotiate a proof but ordered the Gorkhalis to offer one to them. From the Chinese perspective and sources, it is hard to imagine that Fuk’anggan issued any written guarantee to the Gorkhalis, as his letters were all called “summons” (*xi* 檄), implying an unequal relationship.

It was quite likely that the agreement of Betravati was never formalised in a single document signed by both parties but rather a consensus

412 TP 635–46; Komatsubara 2017; Theobald 2020, 121.

413 The Tibetan term *gan rgya* “written contract” for it seems to be a transcription and translation of the Chinese word. Cp. Kobayashi 2018. The word *rgya* means “seal” in Tibetan, which had great significance in Tibetan politics from medieval times.

414 Fuk’anggan on 13 August 1792 (QL 57/6/26) wrote, “Now according to the petition of Bhotu Pāṇḍe, etc., in front of me, you wished to establish and issue the proof of willingness to indicate that you dare not to disturb any more. This is extremely unsuitable”. “今著普魯爾邦哩等面稟，欲將不敢再行滋事緣由，立具甘結，所言尤屬不合”。The Emperor replied in his edict: “How could the grand Heavenly Dynasty consider it worthwhile to take up a written proof with you?” “以堂堂天朝，豈屑與汝立結” (WZTZ 1896, vol. 13.2, 30–32). Normally, the Chinese Empire could not offer any written document as proof or treaty. It can only bestow edict to the tributary states.

established through an exchange of letters and messages (2.2.2–3). It might also be concluded retrospectively. To date, there appears to be no document in the Nepalese archives that formally attests to the peace arrangements described by General Padma Jang in his *Life of Maharaja Sir Jang Bahadur* (1909), although this account is provided without any accompanying original document. The Nepalese scholar Yogi Naraharinātha (2.1.6) summarises this “religious agreement” (*dharmapatra*), the *Gorkhara Bhoṭako Mudrā Sandhi* (VS 1847), commonly known as the so-called “Treaty of Betravati,” as follows and mentions that this is a Nepālī summary of the treaty written in English and stored in the Jaisikotha office in Kathmandu, probably the version Padma Jung was quoting:

1. From now onwards, China (Cīna) will remain as a father (*pitā*) of both Nepal and Tibet. Nepal and Tibet will behave with each other as brothers.
2. The price of the commodities looted in Lhasa should be paid by the Tibetan officials to the Nepalīs after a proper investigation by the government of China.
3. Excluding armed soldiers, any Nepālī is allowed to enter the border of Tibet and China at any time, establish factories and runs business.
4. If a fight breaks out between two brothers (Tibet and Nepal), the representatives of both governments should send a detailed report to Peking. The Peking Palace will make a final decision to solve the problem.
5. If a foreign power attacks Nepal, China will support Nepal.
6. To respect and show ‘a father son relationship’, the two brothers (Nepal and Tibet) will send products of their own country to China once in every 5 years.
7. In return, China will send presents (*kośelī*) to show friendship. China will make all necessary arrangements for the diplomats (of Nepal and Tibet) who come to and leave China.<sup>415</sup>

Naraharinath (1964, 2) gives a slightly different translation:

#### **Gorkha-Bhot-China-Arbitration-Treaty 1792**

1. That China should henceforth be considered as father to both Gorkha and Bhot [Tibet] who should regard each other as brothers.

415 2.1.6 (Naraharinātha 1965, 20); id. 1964, 2; cp. Stiller 1975, 197–98.

2. That after due investigation by the Chinese Government the Value of the articles plundered at Lhasa would be paid to the Gorkha sufferers by the Bhote authorities.
3. That all Gorkhali subjects with the exception of armed soldiers, would ever be permitted to travel, to establish factories and to carry on trade within the Jurisdiction of Gorkha and Bhot.
4. That if either of the two brotherly states should commence on unprovoked dispute with the intention of possessing the territories of the other, the representatives of the two Governments would report all particulars to the court of Peking which would finally decide the dispute.
5. That if Gorkha be ever invaded by a foreign power China would not fail to help her.
6. The two brotherly states would send to China some produce of their countries every five years in token of their filial love.
7. That the Chinese Government would in return send to Gorkha a friendly present and would make every necessary arrangement for the comfort of the mission to and from.

Paragraph 1 can be traced in the letters (or in Chinese, “petition” *bing* 稟) from Rana Bahadur Shah to Fuk’anggan. Paragraph 2 of compensation for the confiscation of Newar merchants’ commodities was done earlier and later in Lhasa and thus not negotiated on the battlefield according to Chinese sources. Paragraphs 6 and 7 were later carried out by missions to Peking. However, the rest paragraphs were not acceptable in the eyes of the Qing Empire. Paragraphs 3, 4, and 5 were all firmly refuted by Fuk’anggan, Hešen, and the Emperor sooner or later. Particularly, it would be utterly impossible for the Chinese to accept paragraph 5, as was explained by Hešen to Devadatta Thapa (2.2.2e).<sup>416</sup> As for paragraph 3, the Emperor even said that the connection between Gorkha and Tibet should be cut off entirely and permanently in his official edicts of authorisation (2.2.3c), but Fuk’anggan later requested the Emperor to re-open the trade route on certain conditions.

Whether this contract existed cannot be conclusively clarified, although the possibility was ruled out by the Chinese sources, considering the rebuttals from the Ministers and Gorkha’s numerous letters and gestures of submission and tribute.

416 For the underlying “diplomatic” considerations, cp. Mosca 2013, 294–97.

## Presents or tributes

The tributary issue starts with paragraphs 5–7 of the “Betravati Treaty”. Paragraph 6 speaks of “products of their own country” (i.e., Nepal and Tibet) to be sent to China. Have these been tributes? What were the Chinese understandings of a tribute? Had Nepal thus become a tributary state? Most scholars call these products simply “presents” or “gifts”.

Naraharinātha, in his writings, uses the term *koṣelī* in Nepālī, which translates to “present.” The document from VS 1850 (2.1.5, 4<sup>v</sup>) mentions *najara tohaphā*, “honorary gifts and presents.” Rose notes that “Nepali documents invariably refer to the items sent to the Emperor as ‘gifts’ (i.e., *saugauli*).”<sup>417</sup> However, this may be a mistake on Rose’s part, and it is more likely that he meant *saugāta*, a term frequently used in related documents.<sup>418</sup> *Saugāta* is a Persian loan word that conveys the meaning of “a present given to a higher person or authority”<sup>419</sup> or, less likely, “present for a friend and others brought from a foreign country.”<sup>420</sup>

In Nepalese documents, the goods from Nepal were commonly referred to as *māmuli saugāta*, meaning “ordinary (or regular) presents” and not *sirto* the term usually used for tributes. But in Chinese sources, these same goods were described as “tributes” (Chinese: *gong* 貢) or “regional products” (*fang-wu* 方物) that Nepal had to pay.<sup>421</sup> The term “tribute envoy” (Chinese: *gong-shi* 貢使) was used from the beginning in BLBJL in 1790.<sup>422</sup> Erich Haenisch, in his work translating Manchu and Tibetan edicts and documents of the Emperor, explicitly and correctly interprets the “products of the country” as tributes.<sup>423</sup> He considers the relationship between China and Nepal in the late nineteenth century to be a tributary one, with the “presents” being regarded as tributary payments (“Tributleistung”), and the agreement of Kyirong as a tributary contract (“Tributvertrag”). Additionally, historical records indicate that

417 Rose 1971, 63 n. 43.

418 See, for instance Manandhar 2001, 155–60, appendices F–Z; Phatya Śaṃśera 1893.

419 Cp. NBŚ: *āphubhandā ṭhulo vyaktiharulāi ṭakryāine koṣelī*.

420 Singh 2002, s.v. *saugāt*.

421 KRKJL, vol. 41, 42 passim.

422 BLBJL, *Poems by the Emperor*, 26.

423 Tib. “*gus ’byul byed pa* = [Manchu] *albabun jafara* = Tribut darbringen” (Haenisch 1938, 38). B. Acharya (2013, 25) summarises the passage of the ‘treaty’ as such: “Both Nepal and Tibet will have to send a delegation to pay tribute to the Imperial Court in China every five years.” Cp. Petech 1984, 213–24 who also speaks of tributes.

in 1877, one of the Nepalese missions was accommodated “in the dirty building assigned to the missions of the tributary nations.”<sup>424</sup> All the Chinese sources (2.2) agree upon the term “tribute”, be it a document or a historiography. The Imperial Statutes told the institutions to treat the Gorkha tributary envoy as the envoys of the Tibetan lamas, while their music was listed along the Myanmar, Vietnamese, Korea, and other vassal states. The *Draft History of Qing* was most explicit about it as Gorkha was listed under “subordinate states” or “vassals” (屬國).<sup>425</sup>

The practice of labelling gifts as tributes in Chinese sources is not exclusive to the Nepalese context. It can be observed in the British mission of Lord Macartney as well. The British, Netherlands, Russian, French, Bolognese, Hungarian were all listed as tributary states in the imperial archives and paintings.<sup>426</sup> Even the envoy of the Pope (Chin. 意大里亞教化王 Mnc. *idailiya gurun-i tacihiyara wembure wang*) in 1725 (YZ 3) was considered a tributary envoy to the court in Peking (Chin. 來貢 Mnc. *albabun jaḥaṅjiha*).<sup>427</sup>

The semantic differences between terms such as Nepalese *māmuli saugāta* and *kośelī*, and Chinese 貢 *gong* or 朝貢 *chao-gong*—cp. Table 3—are not merely translational issues. They reflect distinct worldviews and political systems at various levels and locations. While presents are typically given voluntarily, expressing respect, affection, or gratitude, tributes represent obligations that establish a hierarchical relationship between the giver and receiver. Tributes are regularly paid by one state or ruler to another as a sign of dependence. The most possible situation was that the Gorkhals followed the Tibetan understanding of such a gift, given the fact that they were often operated by the ambans and institution in charge of Tibetan affairs.

The Tibetans themselves seem to have understood the “tribute” as a “regard” or “greeting”, as the term *mtshams zhu* was used by Tenzin Peljor to refer to the Gorkhali tributary envoys after both wars. However, the Tibetan texts issued by the Emperor used the word *gus 'bul* instead, which indicated his emphasis that the gift was sent out of humble respect. Regularity was not embodied by the two words, though

424 Manandhar and Mishra 1986, 40.

425 屬 means “attach” literally in canonical commentaries. It means “vassal”, “colonial”, “subordinate”, and “tributary state” according to Lobscheid (1866–69, 425, 1704, 1825, 1911). Mvy. gave Tib. *brtags pa / phal pa* or Skt. *parijana* Tib. *g.yog 'khor*. Mvy. also gave *māṇḍalikarājā*.

426 Chuang 1989.

427 Ibid., 67.

prescribed by the imperial statutes. They also seem to have much less sense of subordination compared to the Chinese terms that derived from the sense of “upwards”. Nor had it the strong inherent sense of obligation as the Manchu and Chinese terms that are closely connected with “tax”.

Table 3: Terms for tributes or gifts

<b>Nepālī / Sanskrit / Persian</b>	
<i>āph āphnā deśamā ujjeko vastu</i>	“Products of their own country” (cp. Chinese: <i>fangwu</i> 方物)
<i>koṣelī</i>	“Gift”
<i>saugāta</i>	“Gift given to a higher person or authority, gift to a friend and others brought from a foreign country”
<i>māmuli saugāta</i>	“Ordinary (or regular) gifts”
<i>upahāra</i>	“Gift” <sup>428</sup> (This term is not used in the sources.)
<i>dāna</i>	“Gift”, corresponding to classical Chinese 施 <i>shi</i> “donation” (This term is not used in the sources.)
<i>sirto</i>	“Tribute” (This term is not used in the sources.)
<i>nazar</i> (Persian)	“Customary payment” CPC X, no. 851, p. 179, quoted above
<b>Chinese and Manchu Used in the Documents</b>	
方物 <i>fang-wu</i>	“Regional product”, classical term for “tribute” <sup>429</sup>
貢 <i>gong</i>	“Tribute” or “tax”; literally also “up” <sup>430</sup> , also used as verb

428 Nepāla VS 2020, 90.

429 “Regional products” was the classical term for “tribute”, first to be found in *the Hounds of Lü*: “Oh! the intelligent kings paid careful attention to their virtue, and the wild tribes on every side acknowledged subjection to them. The nearer and the more remote all presented the productions of their countries, in robes, food, and vessels for use.” (transl. by Legge) 嗚呼! 明王慎德, 四夷咸賓。無有遠邇, 畢獻方物, 惟服食用。

430 貢 *Gong* was often combined or glossed with “offer upwards” (*xian* 獻), “collect” (*fu* 賦) or “tax” (*shui* 稅), especially in the commentaries to *The Rite of Zhou*, that ordered it to be paid by feudatories in autumns (周禮·秋官·小行人 “令諸侯秋入貢”). “Tax” was even used in the sixth century dictionary 玉篇 as the gloss. In the Confucian model, interpreted by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, the 2nd century classicist, the product of land (九穀山澤之材) should be sent to the monarch who gathered products from everywhere (周禮·冬官·匠人 “九夫為井” 鄭注 “自治其所受田, 貢其稅穀”; 天官·小宰 “以聚百物” 鄭注 “職方制其貢”). It was

Table 3 (continued)

職貢 <i>zhi-gong</i>	“Obligatory/regular tribute” <sup>431</sup>
獻 <i>xian</i>	Literally “forward [in a sacrifice]” <sup>432</sup> , “offer to the superior” <sup>433</sup> , the most common verb for “paying [tribute]”
賁 <i>ji</i>	“Bring”, “hold”, “present”, commonly used as verb for 貢
Mnc. <i>belek</i> < Mon. <i>beleg</i> (бэлэг)	Terms used to name the Gorkha horses, <sup>434</sup> “auspiciousness” from Mongolian “gift”, later Chin. <i>bai-lek</i> 伯勒克 <sup>435</sup>
Mnc. <i>albabun</i>	“Tributary object” = 貢品 <sup>436</sup>
Mnc. <i>albabun jafara</i>	“Present tribute” = 進貢 <sup>437</sup>
<b>Tibetan Terms</b>	
<i>gus 'bul byed pa</i> = [Manchu] <i>albabun jafara</i>	“[Humble] respect donation/present”, “offering tribute” <sup>438</sup> , (Haenisch 1938, 38), term used in Potala Inscription
<i>srid zhu'i gus 'bul zhe sa tshad</i> <sup>439</sup>	“The object of high honour and immeasurable respect” (This term is not used in the sources.)

used to translate *śulka* in the story of Mātāṅga in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (摩登伽經卷1 明往緣品:「貢稅法」CBETA 2024.R3, Taishō 21, no. 1300, 402b29; Wogihara 1988, 1342a), while more often it was taken for its meaning “upwards” as in *utkrośayati* (Mvy., Wogihara, 388b).

- 431 The classical glossary gave the meaning of 職 *zhi* as “perpetual”, “regular” or “normal” 常, as the Sanskrit *nitya*. Zheng Xuan again glossed it as “tax” (周禮·夏官·大司馬“施貢分職”鄭注“謂賦稅也”). Zheng also glossed the word in the sense of obligation elsewhere (周禮·夏官·掌固“民皆職焉”鄭注“謂守與任也”). Lobscheid identified 貢, 職貢, and 賦 all as “tribute” (1866–69, 1825).
- 432 鄭玄注周禮·春官·大宗伯“獻, 獻醴, 謂薦血腥”, a more common gloss would be 進 “forward”.
- 433 鄭玄注周禮·天官·玉府有云“古者致物於人, 尊之則曰獻”. It can also be glossed as 貢 “to pay tribute” on itself. For the commentaries of Zheng cited above, we have consulted Zhang Shun-hui’s thesaurus of Zheng Xuan (張舜徽 鄭雅 Zhang 2005).
- 434 Lin 2009, 321.
- 435 Oidtmann 2018, 122.
- 436 The noun comes from from *alban*, “tax, labour duty, tribute”.
- 437 The verb is *jafambi*, which means “grasp”, “hold up”, “prepare”, “collect tax”, etc.
- 438 The Tibetan noun is a compound of *gus* and ‘*bul*, meaning “humble” or “devotion” and “gift”, “tribute”, or “offering” respectively.
- 439 Karmay 1991, 11, 18.

Table 3 (continued)

<i>mtshams zhu</i>	“Regards” This is the term used by Tenzin Peljor.
<i>brtan bzhugs</i> > Mnc. <i>Danšuk</i> > Chin. <i>Dan-shuk</i> 丹書克	“Celebration on longevity”. The gift from Tibetan Lamas, understood by some Chinese as “tribute”. (This is not used in the sources, but used as a loan word in the imperial statutes.)

The coexistence of such different understandings of central terms in the agreement on the quinquennial envoy to Peking suggests that the linguistic difference was intentionally maintained rather than perceived as an insurmountable problem. Tibetan language seems to have played a significant role as the amban contacted the Gorkhals in Tibetan and the Qing Empire had a branch in Li-fan-yuan on Tibetology (唐古特學). Indeed, we see the possible of fluidity in the Tibetan language. The “gift” can be a “tribute” in a political sense, a “regard” between friends, an “offering” religiously, or a ritual prayer for longevity. The Tibetan monks sent envoys to Peking or Jehol, carrying their *brtan bzhugs* that congratulate the birthdays of the Emperor or the new year, which was called “the yearly line [of messengers] to have audience” (*nian-ban* 年班). Therefore, it was often periodical. It was also managed by the imperial statutes, as not all lamas were able to send regards. The verb was also not the traditional Confucian “offer upward” (*gong/xian* 貢/獻), but “reverently pass forward” (*cheng-di/gong-di* 呈遞/恭遞), although it had another name still called “enter for tribute” (*ru-gong* 入貢) in the Late Qing imperial statutes written in Chinese.<sup>440</sup> Chinese people can thus interpret it as a “tribute”, which would be negligent of the complexity. In fact, the Emperor could also grant (*ci* 賜) *Danšuk* to the lamas.<sup>441</sup>

When it comes to the Gorkha Kingdom’s envoy, the term used in the *Painting of Tributary Bearers* (Figure 16) was “enter for the audience” (*ru-jin* 入覲).<sup>442</sup> The text was drafted by the Grand Council in Chinese and then translated into Manchu.<sup>443</sup> The term *jin* 覲 or Mnc. *hargašanjimbi* /

440 *Qin-ding Li-fan-bu Ze-li*, vol. 57, no. 811 喇嘛事例中 八百一十一: 前後藏各間兩年一次遣使入貢.

441 故琿 000800N000000000, labelled “31 August 1780, the Emperor bestowed *Danšuk* to Panchen Erdeni [...]” 乾隆四十五年八月初二日, 皇上賜班禪額爾德呢丹書克. [...]

442 Schorkowitz and Chia 2016, 216–17.

443 Chuang 1992.



Figure 16: Balabhadra Khavas and his servant as the envoy of the audience (入覲), Painted in 1790s in Painting of Tributary Bearers 職貢圖 (source: Wikimedia Commons)

*hargaśambi* means “meeting the monarch” or “meet in court”. The Manchu term also means “to look up”, “to look in distance” and “to admire”, while the Chinese term is the specific word for the ritual meeting between feudatories and the son of Heavens.<sup>444</sup> It was once used by Buddhists for the Skt. *drś/paś*, “to see, to respect”, especially with the Buddha.<sup>445</sup> The reverent nature in this meeting is self-evident.

According to the imperial archives, battlefield negotiations, the courtly records, and the imperial corpora of statutes, it was crucial that the Qing Empire regarded and treated Nepal as a tributary state. The way the gifts were presented, as well as the accommodation provided in Beijing designated for tributary states, exemplify this hierarchical relationship. Insisting on the term “products of the country,” which includes edible goods, can be seen as a symbolic incorporation of the subordinate state into the dominant power’s framework. The Emperor would take some share of the products from all lands that ultimately belonged to him or were under his command.

However, it seemed that the practical focus on the Nepalese envoy was their admiration and audience instead of what was presented, as there were no prescriptions on the gift themselves. For the Mongolian groups and Solon, there were detailed instructions on what should be

444 禮記·曲禮下“天子當依而立，諸侯北面而見天子，曰覲”。

445 E.g. in *Saddharanḍarikasūtram*, passim.

sent from them as tribute (*gong-shu* 貢輸), as they were integrated into the census and of the Empire.<sup>446</sup>

In fact, some of these ‘regional products’ originated from India rather than Nepal.<sup>447</sup> Rana Bahadur Shah admitted that the products of his country would not be good enough: “(...) since I am in a remote, desolate, and tiny region, there is no good product from [our region].”<sup>448</sup>

The presents from Nepal generally included tusks, coral pearls (Figure 17), gemstones, various cloths and dresses, betel, nutmeg, cardamon horns of rhinos, swords, small machetes (*khukuris*) etc.; in the 1894 mission:

A string of 109 coral beads, a piece of silk brocade, 24 rolls of satin, 13 pieces of felt cloth, 2 Rhinoceros horns, 4 Tusks of ivory, 1,000 Nutmegs, 360 oz. of Cloves, 300 oz. of Cinnamon, 360 oz. of betel nut (round), 6000 oz. of betel nut (flat), 3 Fowling pieces (all complete) and 12 Swords of different kinds.<sup>449</sup>

In the 1792–1793 mission the following presents were made:

(...) an Indian palanquin, a traditional Nepalese sword called a kukri, as well as items used in Chinese medicine that were difficult to acquire in China (such as coral, cinnamon, safflower, betel palm, cloves, and *Alpinia katsumadai* seed (Mingqing shiliao, Geng vol., book 9, pp. 861–63). Most importantly for our purposes, the offering also included draft horses and five tame elephants.<sup>450</sup>

446 *Qin-ding Li-fan-bu Ze-li*, vol. 17. The Solon people should offer minks, while the lower Mongolian rulers had the duty of providing sheep. The Khalkha Khans needed to offer nine whites, including one white camel and eight white horses every year.

447 See, for instance, Phatya Śaṃśera 1893 (2.1.13) an order (*ādeśa*) through which the ambassador (*vakila*) to the East India Company is asked to send articles from Calcutta to be presented to the Emperor of China via Kathmandu. Cp. Manandhar 2001, 34.

448 See Part II, 2.2.3d.

449 Manandhar 2001, 190.

450 Komatsubara 2019, 84. Ming-qing Shi-liao, Geng is 明清史料庚編, *The Seventh Collection of the Historical Archival Materials of Ming and Qing Dynasties* from Academia Sinica. This volume contains cabinet documents on tributary and foreign affairs.



*Figure 17:* Coral Beads as tributary gift from the Gorkha King, dated 5 February 1793, note made on 21 March 1793 (source: National Palace Museum Taipei, 玉插屏。國立故宮博物院, 台北. CC BY 4.0. www.npm.gov.tw. 故玉 002723N000000000)

In this context, these elephants took on special, imperial significance. Interestingly, the elephants were seen as a special tribute.<sup>451</sup> (Figure 18) They were not considered celebratory tribute items. They were large and difficult to transport, so they had to take a different route like the other tributary gifts. It was intended by the Gorkhals to also present elephants but due to the rough terrain they had to return from the Kuti (Nyalam) pass at the Tibetan border.<sup>452</sup> In addition, there were already too many elephants in the stables of the palace in Beijing. Qianlong therefore issued the following instructions regarding these elephants:

451 Cp. Bajracharya/Khawiwoda/Michaels 2015.

452 See Part II, 2.2.2d; Komatsubara 2019; for detailed lists of the gifts, see Lèvi 1905, 191–92; Haenisch 1938, 35 (on the 1790 mission); Manandhar and Mishra 1986, 36 and appendices; Manandhar 2001, appendices to the chapters on the various missions. He-ying oversaw transportation and wrote a long poem on it in 1793. The elephants walked 30 *li* a day and crossed the river by leather rafts or suspension bridges. They also suffered from the lack of food (He-ying 1823, vol. 1, 25–26).



Figure 18: From the scroll of Gorkhali Offering of Elephants and Horses by the Beise Hong-wu (source: Wikimedia Commons)

Currently, there are already many elephants in the capital (Beijing), and there are enough for escort exhibitions. However, until now, there have been no elephants in Tibet. Tell Fuk'anggan the Emperor's edict is transmitted, and from those elephants being sent to Beijing, one is given to the Dalai Lama and one to the Panchen Lama and the other three sent to Beijing at a slow pace, the monks and laypeople of Ü-Tsang will always see the offered items from afar, gradually adopt the [Qing Court's] system, and be shown the prestige and authority [of the Qing Court]. (Kuoerka dang, nineteenth day of the ninth month of Qianlong 57) [i.e., KRKD QL 57/9/19]<sup>453</sup>

The amban He-ying oversaw transportation and wrote a long poem on it in 1793. The elephants walked 30 *lis* a day and crossed the river by leather rafts or suspension bridges. They also suffered from the lack of food.<sup>454</sup> The elephants and horses were given Manchu and Chinese names.<sup>455</sup> The elephant (*xiang* 象) would bear a bottle (*ping* 瓶) which

453 Quoted from Komatsubara 2019, 85. See also KRKJL, vol. 51, QL 58/3/8.

454 He-ying 1823, vol. 1, 25–26.

455 Lin 2009, 321. “Taming the remote”, “Subjugating tenderly” 馴遠象伏柔象. The pair of elephants and the two horses were also painted by Louis Antoine de Poiret and Joseph Panzi with Manchu-Chinese bilingual annotation, see Nie 1999, 244–47, no. 64.

was homophonous of an important imperial omen (*xiang* 象) of peace (*ping* 平), called “the peace, abundance, and prosperity of having an elephant” *tai-ping you-xiang* 太平有象. The South Asian elephants were often presented in such a manner.<sup>456</sup> The motif was also made into lamps, vases, and jade plates.<sup>457</sup>

In the meantime, some elephants remained in Tibet upon the imperial edict. They were regarded as an auspicious and sacred gift and a sign of the victory but the Lhasa one died of illness very soon, while the Panchen Lama gave Dalai his elephant instead.<sup>458</sup> Later the Gorkha King sent two more elephants to Tibet in 1795.<sup>459</sup>

These gifts were translated into an unbalanced relation, stressing the dominance of the Qing Empire. It was not a one-way gift but an unbalanced exchange. The Emperor cared for the tributary envoy a lot. Winter clothes were to be made for them on their journey.<sup>460</sup> The local governors would provide plays, opera, accommodation, and horses for them.<sup>461</sup> The Emperor would be delighted and constantly grant gifts back as has been told by Devadatta Thapa to Rana Bahadur Shah (2.2.3f). The Emperor settled on a long list of gifts to the King and Regent of Gorkha as well as every member of the envoy before the arrival.<sup>462</sup> Later, Fuk’anggan passed the request of the Gorkha mission to have more rewards from the Emperor, when he met the returning envoy in Dartsemdo. The Emperor gave more gifts of imperial garments and golden hat-tops to them on 24 June 1793.<sup>463</sup> The Newar merchant in Lhasa was also awarded with silver ingots for his contribution during the conflicts.<sup>464</sup>

The Qing court never objected that some of these presents thus had been bought in India but insisted that they were much less in value than their own presents: 4,829 vs. 14,902 *tael* were the fixed values of the goods exchanged—a fact that would show the claimed superiority of China over Nepal. The rewarding gifts were meant to show the abundance of the Empire and the benevolence of the Emperor. It was prescribed in one of the four essential Confucian classics *The State of*

456 Ho and Bronson 2004, 77.

457 Ibid., 259.

458 DL8, 369.

459 DL8, 384.

460 BLBJL, vol. 26, QL 54/9/29.

461 BLBJL, vol. 25.

462 KRKD QL 57/12, 73–84.

463 KRKJL, vol. 52, QL 58/5/17.

464 KRKJL, vol. 43, QL 57/10/21.

*Equilibrium and Harmony* drawn from the *Book of Rites*.<sup>465</sup> The *amban* Sungyūn quotes the classical idiom and confirms this hierarchy in his *Maps and Strategies of Enlisting the West* (西招圖略 *Xi-zhao Tu-lüe*) in 1798:

One should control one's desire: "(...) Considering the kings of ten thousand countries coming to present their tribute and congratulate the longevity of the Emperor, the sacred Emperor pays back much while receiving less so as to conciliate the remote."<sup>466</sup>

Accordingly, the presents from China included brocade and silk (clothes), hats, a ceremonial robe (*khilat*)<sup>467</sup>, carpets, tea pots and dishes (often glassware and porcelain), rosary beads (朝珠 *chao-zhu* "beads for audiences"), bags (荷包 *he-bao* "Beutel"),<sup>468</sup> tea, silver etc.<sup>469</sup> In the penultimate mission (1894), the presents consisted

of a thousand taels of silver (£180), four complete suits of fur, robes of wadded cotton and gauze for each member of the

- 465 "To escort them on their departure and meet them on their coming; to commend the good among them, and show compassion to the incompetent: this is the way to treat indulgently men from a distance. To restore families whose line of succession has been broken, and to revive states that have been extinguished; to reduce to order states that are in confusion, and support those which are in peril; to have fixed times for their own reception at court, and the reception of their envoys; to send them away after liberal treatment, and welcome their coming with small contributions: this is the way to cherish the princes of the states" (transl. by Legge) 中庸: 送往迎來, 嘉善而矜不能, 所以柔遠人也; 繼絕世, 舉廢國, 治亂持危, 朝聘以時, 厚往而薄來, 所以懷諸侯也。
- 466 Sunyūn 1798 (1847) 西招圖略: 5. "邁欲": "惟萬國來王, 各獻厥貢, 祝壽無疆, 而聖皇厚往薄來所以柔遠人也" Cp. Dabringhaus 1994, 191.
- 467 A *khillat* from Urdu *khil'ah* is a ceremonial silk or cotton robe, which richly adorned and given as a sign of highly respected honour guests or other persons. They are also considered as gifts awarded in return for service from tributary states. Wearing the robes with python (quasi-dragons) patterns 蟒袍 that were bestowed by the Emperor implied a ritual integration into the Qing Empire, as was done by the Vietnamese envoy (Ge 2014). The alternation of cloth was significant for the Manchu emperors. The hats 頂戴 and rosary beads 朝珠 were indicators of ranking within the imperial system. They were also a part of the imperial dress code. These gifts thus have specific ritual meanings.
- 468 These bags 荷包 were often given to ministers as rewards to show the personal intimacy between them and the Emperor. For a detailed study and photos of these bags, see Martin 1945.
- 469 The gifts in 1793 were listed in KRKD (QL 57/12, 75). These gifts in 1793 were taken as the precedence in the imperial legal corpora for reference under the circumstances of later envoys.

mission, besides silk pongees and gauze, Peking curios and the like, according to the rank of the recipients.<sup>470</sup>

This imbalance in the exchange of presents was early noticed by the British:

The fact is that Sir Jang Bahadur's cupidity is the motive spring. He sends Yak's tails and gets back gifts, Pictai Vestis et auri.<sup>471</sup> He gives a trout and catches a salmon.<sup>472</sup>

As it seems, the intentional preservation of linguistic distinctions served the purpose of reinforcing the power dynamics and maintaining the desired hierarchical relationship between China and Nepal. It allowed China to assert its dominance and control over Nepal as a tributary state, while Nepal navigated this complex linguistic and political terrain to uphold its own interests and maintain autonomy within the framework of the tribute system.

### Exchange of texts

The imbalance was also seen in the genre of texts. The distinction between the *arjī* (petition) sent by Nepal's king to the Emperor and the *parvānā* (an order from a person in superior position) received in response highlights the hierarchical relationship between the two entities. The *arjī* represents a subordinate's communication to a superior, while the *parvānā* is an order from a person in a position of authority. A sample of such a *parvānā* from 1415 edited by Dhanavajra Vajrācārya,<sup>473</sup> demonstrates the dominant tone<sup>474</sup> used by the Emperor Yongle when addressing King Shaktisimha Rama of Palanchok. The Emperor does not employ honorific verb forms and instead gives orders (*ājñā*) while praising the king

470 *The Times*, 25 December 1896 quoted from Sever 1989, 205. Fur 貂皮 was probably the indicator of the imperial control in Northeast Asia and the "Sable Road".

471 A quotation from *Aeneid* 9,26, meaning 'rich in gold and colourful robes'.

472 Thornton to Wade, 25 July 1876, Foreign Secret Consultations, 3 Sept. 1876, no.s 129–33 quoted from Dhanalaxmi 1981, 70.

473 Dh. Vajrācārya 2011, 251–54.

474 Correspondingly, letters from the Nepalese kings to the Chinese Emperor were written in a submissive and devote style, see, for example, the letter of Surendra Vikrama Bahadur Shah in Lèvi 1905, vol. 2, 188–91.

for his submission to imperial commands. The *parvānā* mentions the annual sending of various gifts (*vividhopahāravastu*) by the king, a fact also noted in the *Nepālikabhūpavaṃśāvalī* (18.132), where the “presents” are called *saugāta*.

When a letter was sent to China from Kathmandu, China demanded a form of submission to the higher power through letters that had to be written in a certain style—a style that paid homage to the Emperor and had to make the scribe appear physically small—to show reverence and obedience (恭順).

As the Qing forces advanced, the Gorkhalis, now severely weakened, repeatedly pleaded for mercy and offered to surrender. In the letters preserved in WZTZ (see also Part II, 2.2.2a, c, d, and 2.2.3a), Rana Bahadur Shah expressed his submission to the Emperor and promised to obey his commands in the future. Terrified by the overwhelming power of the Qing army, the Gorkhalis complied with all of Fuk’anggan’s demands. As they neared Yambu (Kathmandu), the Gorkhalis sent envoys on several occasions, urgently requesting capitulation. Yet, they were too afraid to approach the Qing camp in person.

On 2 August 1792 (QL 57/6/15), for example, Fuk’anggan criticises the Gorkhalis for their futile resistance, noting that the Qing forces had already conquered territories up to Dhunce. He chastises King Rana Bahadur Shah for failing to surrender earlier, accusing him of greed, dishonesty, and cunningness. Fuk’anggan demands that the King personally come to submit to the Qing, warning of severe consequences if the Qing army reaches Kathmandu.

Similarly, on 13 August 1792 (QL 57/6/26), Fuk’anggan acknowledges Rana Bahadur Shah’s expression of obedience but insists that surrender will only be accepted if the King personally appears. He references the example of the King of Vietnam, who accompanied Fuk’anggan on his return to see the Emperor in 1788 (QL 53). Fuk’anggan rejects the King’s request to negotiate a treaty through intermediaries, declaring it impossible. He stresses that he has treated the people along his route with respect, in line with Qing customs. Furthermore, he demands that the Gorkha forces withdraw completely, return all captured goods and people, and provide the illegal treaties previously established. If these demands are not met, Fuk’anggan threatens to march directly to Kathmandu. In addition, he returns the gifts sent by Rana Bahadur Shah, rejecting them outright. This letter was probably called a “decree” or “letter of authority” (*bka’ shog*) by Tenzin Peljor (Part II, 2.3.2d).

On 26 August 1792, Fuk'anggan reports receiving an obedient surrender from Kathmandu. By mid-September 1792, Rana Bahadur Shah sends multiple letters to Fuk'anggan and the Emperor, confessing his mistakes, formally surrendering, and promising regular tribute. He agrees to return territories to Tibet and renounces previous treaties. These letters<sup>475</sup> began with “the tiny one” (小的), in smaller font, while addressing Qianlong as the universal “Great Emperor”, put on the top of the paper. Such diction was memorialised to the Emperor immediately.<sup>476</sup> This applies both to letters of submission and to friendly letters when a birthday or other happy events.

Nevertheless, these letters from Rana Bahadur Shah could have been embellished by the Chinese translators. It might have been transferred from a letter (*shu* 書) into a petition (*bing* 稟), a statement or an auspicious memorial (*biao* 表), and a capitulation (*xiang-biao* 降表). It could be because the translators were eager to retreat by the fierce battles and hardships that they more and more intensively polished the language to please the Emperor and obstruct further conflicts. This cannot be proven for letters, as the original Nepālī letters are not preserved or accessible. But in the case of a song (2.2.4), which Rana Bahadur Shah is said to have written in honour of Qianlong and which is kept in four languages in the palace, it can be seen that only the first verse is written in proper Nepālī while the rest makes no sense. We are not sure whether it was scribal errors, a joint effort of forgery by Fuk'anggan, etc., or the resistance from the Gorkhalis. Given the linguistic complexity, the two sides reached a conclusion that was acceptable for both.

### Surrender and submission with allegiance

In November 1792, the Emperor issued the Potala inscription that reflects on the Gorkhalis' repeated defeats, noting their desperate pleas for survival and compliance with Qing demands. This includes returning Tenzin Peljor and stolen treasures, as well as their refusal to discuss contentious issues like coinage. The Emperor acknowledges the Gorkhalis' fear and submission but remains resolute, drawing parallels

475 Unfortunately, we could not trace facsimiles of the original Chinese translations but only catalogical entries in the First National Historical Archive.

476 KRKJL, vol. 39 = Yuan Yi Lai, no. 913.

with past historical examples where conquered enemies ultimately submitted to the Heavenly Dynasty.

He views the Gorkhalis' surrender because of both military pressure and their recognition of Qing superiority, framing it as both a "surrender with allegiance" (literally "turning oneself into capitulation" *gui-xiang* 歸降) and a "submission with allegiance" (literally "turn oneself into submission" *gui-shun* 歸順). The former one was the outcome of the military conquest that made sure the Gorkhalis were frightened. The latter one was even better. It indicated that the external "barbarous" people become the subject willingly. Emperor Qianlong considered the return of Dram, the humble tone, and the willingness to obey imperial instructions as a sign of Gorkhali submission. This would become an omen of imperial virtue and heavenly mission that went beyond military power.

\*\*\*

An unequivocal capitulation and submission from the Chinese perspective differs significantly from the Gorkhali viewpoint. This distinction is particularly evident in the interpretation of tributary presents and the status of independence. While the Chinese may view the submission as a clear surrender, the Gorkhalis likely saw it as a diplomatic negotiation or a strategic concession, maintaining a sense of autonomy. For them, the missions "were never accepted by the Nepalese as signifying or acknowledging a feudatory status. They were always regarded as goodwill delegations—gestures of friendship and respect."<sup>477</sup> Prime Minister Candra Shamsheer, for instance, strongly rejected the idea that the "presents" constituted tributes. In a letter to John Manners Smith, Military Attaché to the Foreign Office, dated 19 April 1906, he expressed this stance:

I may here add that the practice of sending a mission was inaugurated soon after the war between this country and China in 1792 A. D., and this practice has since been kept up more commercial advantages than for anything else. The few presents which the mission carries to Peking are not of much value and

477 Sever 1989, 204.

certainly not in the nature of Tribute. The customary letter which is sent on the occasion is written in the truly oriental style of exuberant but meaningless politeness and follows a stereotyped rule. They are merely a means for the party to get access into the country under very advantageous circumstances, and to dispose of with very great profit of large quantity of goods which they take with them. It may be known to you that all goods belonging to the party are carried free from our frontier to Peking and back by the transport provided by the Chinese government which also provides our men free with all necessaries on the road. It was very little political significance, and I wonder therefore, to find the said enclouser [sic!] the presents are described as a tribute from Nepal. In the letter to the Emperor it is distinctly written the word 'saugat' which means 'present'.<sup>478</sup>

Bishop Chauvean confirms this view:

The Chinese all say that Nepal pays tribute to their empire. I doubt much whether such is the intention of the Nepalese Government. What is there to fear from the Chinese in the present day? The only point of contact that there is between them is at Lhasa but it is very certain that the Nepalese are much more powerful at Lhasa than the Chinese, and it would not be surprising if they expelled them altogether some day. Already the Calcutta journals have published that Sir Jung Bahadoor has views on Thibet, the conquest of which does not appear very difficult for an army trained in the European way.<sup>479</sup>

The notion that Gorkha lost its sovereignty through the “treaty” of Betravati is also refused by Nepalese scholars. Randhir Subba, for instance, writes in a review of Leo Rose’s book *Nepal – Strategy for Survival*:

Nor is there any substance in the view that because of the 1792 Nepal-China treaty Nepal lost or limited its sovereignty. That every five years a goodwill delegation used to go to China from

478 Foreign Secret E, June 1906, no.s 241–45, INA quoted from Manandhar and Mishra 2001, 86–87.

479 Quoted from Manandhar 2001, 161.

Nepal to offer presents to the Chinese Emperor is only one aspect of the eastern world attitude. The concept of sovereignty as is prevalent these days originated in the west. The western concept of sovereignty has been adopted by the entire world these days. According to the modern concept, a nation which enjoys the right to establish foreign relations is sovereign. That Nepal sent presents to the Chinese Emperor every five years cannot mean that Nepal lost its sovereignty. Even after signing the 1792 treaty Nepal fought and concluded treaties with Tibet, as well as with the British Empire. Nepal's freedom to maintain foreign relations and determine policies governing these relations remained intact.<sup>480</sup>

Similarly, Dhanavajra Vajrācārya and Jñānamani Nepāla:

Some foreign historians have written that after this was, Nepal became a part of the Chinese empire. But this letter clearly refutes this claim and shows that Nepal had never recognized China's suzerainty. (...) On the contrary, the Chinese troops had suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of Nepali troops in the last battle fought on the Betravati. Moreover, the morale of the Nepali troops was very high during these days. The letter to Kājī Damodar Pande says that 'the Nepal troops by the grace of the goddess, could have completely driven the Chinese troops out. But we did not think it proper to create permanent conflict with the Emperor. He too intends to make peace with us.' The Chinese troops had come very near the capital. Continued conflict with China would therefore have led to possibilities of British pressure over Nepal. In such situation, it was very wise on the part of the Government of Nepal to conclude a treaty with China. No provision in the treaty suggests that Nepal accepted China's suzerainty or [...] its own interests in any way.<sup>481</sup>

To sum up: Despite the claims on victory by both parties and despite clear expressions of surrender preserved in Chinese, Tibetan, and Manchu sources, the outcome of the Sino-Nepalese War can perhaps

480 Subba 1978, 146.

481 Vajrācārya and Nepāla 1970, 73–74.

“be best described as a stalemate. There was no real winner,” as Ludwig Stiller remarked.<sup>482</sup> Similarly, Mayura Tang Kunwar writes: “No treaty was ever drawn up or signed at the cessation of the Sino-Nepalese War in 1793 [sic, read 1792]. There were only exchanges of letters between the Chinese commander and the Nepalese Durbar.”<sup>483</sup> Indeed, the Chinese did not conquer Gorkha, instead withdrew behind the former borders. They did not impose vassalage on Gorkha, but “only” demanded a quinquennial tribute mission, much less than the yearly visit of the Koreans, Mongolians, and some lamas. As a result, Gorkha maintained its independence. Imperial statutes were not applied to them as new legal codes were introduced in Tibet.<sup>484</sup>

Yet, the understanding of Betravati marked the conclusion of the war, resulted in significant losses for Nepal and had a detrimental impact on Nepal’s economic well-being. (From here on it is justified to speak of Nepal instead of Gorkha, as it concerns the impact of the war on the future of the whole country). Among the losses incurred, in addition to the loss of lives, was Nepal’s numismatic suzerainty over Lhasa and other Tibetan regions that had been maintained since the Malla period and the enormous profits through the minting of coins. The economic crisis caused by this loss played a significant role in Nepal’s defeat in the Anglo-Nepal War (1814–1816). In hindsight, it can be argued that Nepal might have been able to avoid a conflict with China had it pursued more diplomatic negotiations instead.

However, it appears that all parties involved in the conflict learned valuable lessons: China realised the formidable strategic barrier posed by the Himalayas; Tibet suffered great losses and recognised its far-reaching dependence on China;<sup>485</sup> Nepal understood the need to halt its expansionist ambitions; and British India realised the futility of attempting to conquer Nepal. As a result, the documents confirm the position that, despite setbacks and losses, Nepal managed to solidify its position between the superpowers of China and British India, while Tibet remained in an unresolved status without gaining independence.

482 Stiller 1975, 212; see also Landon 1976, vol. 1, 68–69; Boulnois 1989, 97; Komatsubara 2017, 181.

483 Kunwar 1962, 294 n. 2; the author refers to Nepali VS 2020, 202–16; Rose 1960, 141; Jain 1959, 105 who all take a similar position.

484 Oidtmann 2018.

485 *Qin-ding Li-fan-bu Ze-li* mentioned that Tibet failed to have as much fiscal surplus as before after the Gorkha robbery (vol. 61, no. 921 西藏通制上 稽查商上公用).

Nepal, thus, successfully maintained its territorial integrity and sovereignty but lost its rights and coinage privileges in Tibet and had to acknowledge, albeit only in a very formal or ritualised way, the suzerainty of the Qing Empire, by sending quinquennial missions to Beijing.<sup>486</sup> Wisely, Gorkha did not dare to challenge the Manchu Emperor's assertion of universal sovereignty. Even Lord Macartney subordinated himself to Beijing's "tributary" claims when he attached pennants with the inscription "The Ambassador bearing tribute from the Kingdom of England" to his ships, which had to be handed over to the palace.<sup>487</sup>

The three states involved in the war, China, Nepal and Tibet, thus got off relatively lightly. However, the two leading generals, Bahadur Shah and Fuk'anggan, who never met, met a tragic fate.<sup>488</sup> Both came from distinguished and respected aristocratic families and could look back on successful careers: Bahadur Shah was the second son of King Prithvi Narayan Shah, while Fuk'anggan was a member of the powerful Manchu Fuca clan and son of the Duke, Grand Secretary Fuheng, who was in turn the brother of Empress Xiao-xian Chun, the first and most loved wife of Qianlong. Fuk'anggan grew up beside the Emperor, which leads to suspicion that he was in fact the biological son of the Emperor, as he was not married to any of the princesses as his brothers did. Both were initially promoted after the war: Bahadur Shah became the most influential leader after Prithvi Narayana Shah; Fuk'anggan became the Duke and the Great General. One would therefore think that both were able to continue living in orderly circumstances after the war. But things turned out differently. Both lived only briefly. Bahadur Shah died at the age of forty, Fuk'anggan at forty-three. In 1794, Regent Bahadur Shah was forced to abdicate by the now adult King Rana Bahadur Shah, was arrested again in 1796 on flimsy charges and cruelly tortured until he died there on 24 June 1797. During the course, Bahadur Shah tried to approach Sungyūn for help, while his request was denied by the Emperor Qianlong who gave his symbolic support to Rana Bahadur Shah.<sup>489</sup> Fuk'anggan was highly praised and then sent for other expeditions with the same title, the Great General. During the war against the Hmong people in Southwest China in 1795–1796, he

486 Cp. Manandhar and Mishra 1986; Sreedhar 1988, Manandhar 2001, Michaels 2019a.

487 Kunwar 1962, 294.

488 Cp. Subedi 2025.

489 Qianlong Manchu Secret Edicts no. 4284.

was granted the title *beise*,<sup>490</sup> a title reserved mainly for the imperial family Aisin Gioro. However, he soon died of miasma in 1796. When Qianlong was still alive, he enjoyed a posthumous kingly title that was only granted to the imperial family members throughout the dynastic history of Qing Empire. He was venerated in the Imperial Ancestral Temple. Soon after the death of the Emperor Qianlong, Fuk'anggan was criticised for his extravagance and indiscretion, as we also see from Zhao-lian's writing (Part II, 2.2.7) and Tenzin Peljor's account (2.3.2e). More folk tales of his bad deeds were circulated in the Empire. Rumours about his being greedy, stupid, conceited, illegitimate, and extravagant never cease to be till today. Seen in this light, these two military leaders were not among the winners of the war.

490 Cp. *Draft History of Qing*, vol. 330 Biography no. 117 福康安.